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ABSTRACT

This overview of continuing education in the People's Republic of China since 1949 delineates its history, describes its current practices and needs, and discusses its future prospects. The paper opens with a discussion of the term "continuing education"; in China, adult education or spare-time education are the usual nomenclature. A historic background of China's library education system precedes a discussion of the urgent need for a supplementary form of education for professional and non-professional staff members. Five types of available continuing education courses are described: (1) advanced study at regular universities; (2) attendance at spare time schools; (3) short training courses; (4) on-the-job training; and (5) correspondence courses. It is noted that correspondence courses are currently the most important and preferred mode of instruction, and their advantages and disadvantages are discussed. A discussion of the future of library science continuing education in China to the year 2000 concludes the paper. (THC)

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Continuing Education of Library Science in the New China

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This paper attempts to present an overview of continuing education in library science in the People's Republic of China and to delineate its history, its current practices and needs, and its future prospects.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to present a general survey on the continuing education of library science in the new China since 1949. Some points concerning the concept of the continuing education of library science in China have to be explained. The usual nomenclature for continuing education is adult education or spare-time education, which provides professional training mostly for the junior staff coming from the middle schools. Due to various historical reasons, library education in China has fallen far behind advanced countries, trailing nearly half a century in both quantity and quality. Because qualified professional staffs are wanting in libraries across the country, the need for supplementary education for the profession is very urgent.

Among the several types of continuing education in the new China, the correspondence course is by far the favorite. This paper will also examine the advantages and disadvantages of the correspondence course. Additionally, future prospects for continuing education of library science in China will be discussed. Statistics cited herein are not official figures.

DISCUSSION ON THE TERM CONTINUING EDUCATION AS PERCEIVED IN CHINA

Since terms may be used differently in different countries, especially in those with dissimilar cultural and social systems, I would like to discuss how the concept of continuing education is perceived in China - what we call it, what it implies, and in what general context we may expect to encounter the term. While our terminology doesn't include the phrase "continuing education" per se, the general terms of adult education and spare-time education are used in place of more precise synonyms. What is meant by adult education in China is the process whereby illiterate adults are given enough training to handle their jobs and enough general education to make them functional members of society. The term, adult education, is also applied to the remedial education provided to cadres holding high posts in government and industry, who have been handicapped by their lack of an adequate education. This remedial education will not only render them competent and qualified for their present positions, but also enable them to be considered for future promotions. Spare-time education is generally defined as the

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education at any level used to upgrade one's knowledge and, consequently, one's work qualifications during free or spare time.

Continuing education in the West is perceived as additional education used to supplement undergraduate work or professional training, or as according to Webster's, "to upgrade one's knowledge, ability, competence, and understanding in one's special field of work." Because China has been comparatively impoverished and backward, education has taken a back seat to other national priorities. As a result, higher education (college) is the highest level of education that our people can expect to attain. The American concept of continuing education as postgraduate or professional studies, or even beyond to postdoctoral training, far exceeds the concept as it is understood in China. In short, regarding continuing education, the term is used, albeit applied to a lesser degree and at a lower level then what is commonly meant with Western usage.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND OF CHINA'S LIBRARY EDUCATION SYSTEM

The library education of a country should correspond to her library development. But it is also true that the library education in most countries lags far behind the development of their library services. Such is the case in my country. For example, in ancient China, according to Sima Qian (Ssuma Ch'ien) - the renowned historian of the Han Dynasty, Lao Zi (Lao Tse), a contemporary of Confucious and the founder of the School of Taoism, had been appointed the Imperial Librarian of the Zhou (Chou) Dynasty, an event that gives the Chinese library a history of approximately twenty-six centuries. By comparison, the history of library education in China is very short indeed, just sixty-five years.

The first library educational organization in China was founded by an American lady, Miss Mary Elizabeth Wood (1882-1931), an alumna of Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts. When she went to China in 1900 to visit her brother, a missionary, very few modern libraries has been established during the rule of the late Qing (Ch'ing) Dynasty. Miss Wood remained in China to help establish not only various libraries, but more importantly, under her guidance, the Faculty of Library Science in 1920 at Wenhua University - an American missionary university at Wuchong, Hubei Province. Two years later, this Faculty became an independent institution known as the Wenhua Library School, the first in China. Because Miss Wood devoted her life to the promotion of libraries and, in particular, library education in China, our country is indebted to her efforts. After her death in 1931, two of her faithful students, who had been sent by Miss Wood to the United States for further training in the American system of library education, continued her work at Wenhua Library School, whose program for the next thirty years provided the first generation of qualified librarians for modern China. These librarians have made major contributions to the development of modern libraries throughout China, especially the academic libraries associated with institutions of higher learning. In 1952, Wenhua Library School was merged into Wuhan University as one of the departments there. This department was enlarged and renamed the School of Library and Information Science last year.

The Department of Library Science at Peking University was founded twenty-seven years after the aforementioned Faculty. During the past thirty-eight years, the Department has undergone many changes. At first, it was a postgraduate department for those graduates from the humanities and social sciences seeking professional library science instruction, originally requiring two years for completion. Later, the length of schooling then fluctuated between two and three years until 1956, when it became a four year undergraduate program. In 1961 and 1962, because the university president at the time thought that it was not suitable to retain a professionally oriented

department of library science at an academic institution such as Peking University, he stopped the enrollment of new students. During the difficult period of the Great Cultural Revolution, there was no enrollment in library science or any other discipline for six years. Under the direction of the Workers' Propaganda Team, the entrance examination requirement was suspended for all divisions from 1972 to 1976, allowing the enrollment of only worker-peasant-soldier students. Most of these students were from junior middle schools, and some had received only primary school education. Nonetheless, all were considered college students and, upon completion of a simplified two year program, received certification when they left the universities. However, in 1977, the department resumed the entrance examination and the four year schooling requirement for undergraduates. Then in 1979, we reinstated a Master's degree program. Master's candidates are selected from the graduates of library science after an intensive entrance examination and review. Additionally, they must complete thirty credits of postgraduate studies and a thesis within two and a half years. Finally, in 1984, graduate students from science departments other than library science were also able to participate in a new Master's program in library science. This group of students, known as the Graduate Class, must complete thirty-six credits in library courses, a thesis, and a two year on-the-job training period, before returning to the university to undergo a rigorous oral review. Upon successful completion of the Master's degree, these graduates return to their on-the-job training locales to assume new professional positions.

To summarize, library education in China has developed so slowly that, for all practical purposes, the state of the profession trails those in advanced countries by nearly half a century. There were only two educational organizations for the whole profession in China between 1949 and 1979. In fact, the total number of graduates during these thirty years is estimated at one thousand eight hundred. Not until 1979 did the field of library education begin to flourish; in that year, two other noted faculties were founded. They are the Department of Library Science at East China Normal University, and the Department of Library Science at Northeast Normal University. Some thirty additional faculties have been established since then.

URGENT NEEDS OF A SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION FOR THE PROFESSION

Everyone knows that a library, despite the presence of many graduates from other specialities, needs a professional staff to smoothly manage and maintain daily operations, as well as to provide planning for future expansion of services and resources in order to serve its community well. Moreover, a reasonable proportion of professional and non-professional staff must be maintained correspondingly. As previously mentioned, there are altogether only eighteen hundred graduates of library science for the past thirty years; those with four years of formal instruction number even less than five hundred. These professionals represent less than two percent of the estimated hundred thousand library personnel in the entire country. Therefore, it is no surprise that despite the desperate need of numerous academic and research libraries for professional staffs, many do not have even one professional librarian. According to the statistics of the Provincial Library of Honan, among the eight hundred thirty-six personnel in the thirty large-sized libraries in that region, only sixty-five people (or 7.7% of the library staff) have undergone professional training. As an additional example, data from the Guangsi (Kwangsi) Autonomous Region (equivalent to a province) show that, even up to 1984, no faculty of library science had been established at the local colleges and universities, while the population had already grown to more than forty million. During the past

thirty-five years, only fifty graduates of library science have been assigned through Peking and Wuhan Universities at the behest of the central government to this region with eighty-seven public libraries, twenty academic and research libraries, and forty information centers. The average per year is a mere 1.4 persons. Some of our colleagues in Guangsi said half in jest, "If we want another fifty, it will take fourteen years more." Of course, the situation is better in major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. However, even though sixty seniors will graduate from the Department of Library Science of Peking University, only forty-two remain, after discounting those who would be entering graduate school or who would be pursuing advanced studies abroad, for assignation to the multitude of libraries applying for them. The extraordinary result is that of the thousand forty-one libraries requesting competently trained librarians, only forty-two will be satisfied; the other nine hundred ninety-nine will be severely disappointed. Currently, there are altogether thirty library and information science faculties with approximately fifteen hundred students attending classes. This dramatic circumstance means that the supply of qualified graduates fo- the whole country is not even foru hundred each year. Although it is hoped that, with expanded facilities, a thousand graduates per year might be attained by 1990, the supply of librarians cannot begin to keep up with the expanding demand.

At present, the majority of library staffs come from middle schools. For instance, among the eighty-nine staff members of the Provincial Library of Honan, thirty-seven are from the senior middle schools (41%) and twenty-six from the junior middle schools (29%), thus making up seventy percent of the total working staff. Since a provincial library is also a research library, the need for a competent staff is paramount. Topmost priority must be allotted to the task of improving the abilities of the young assistants by increasing their qualifications with opportunities for professional training and by teaching them the ABC's of librarianship: Cataloging and Classification, Reference Books and Reference Works, etc. When such courses have been adequately completed by the library assistants, only then can they be considered the equal of college graduates.

This additional training or education is what is called in China supplementary education, since it is a supplement to the regular course of education provided by the government. Being easier and less expensive to administer, this off-campus and/or spare-time education meets the needs of the young assistants on the job and of their respective libraries. Nowadays, supplementary education for library professions are conducted in four distinct modes, discussed in order of their desirability:

1) Official undergraduate programs run by various universities or normal schools in which the proper curricula can be followed, with lecturers demonstrating not only the practice and theory of library science, but also introducing the use of specialized equipment.
2) General educational programs arranged by larger local libraries, usually the provincial library at its capital city, where lecturers can be invited from universities and competent librarians can conduct tutorials.
3) Specific courses undertaken by a cooperative body of libraries in an area whereby the individual educational assets of highly trained personnel or modern equipment is shared jointly to the benefit of all participating libraries.
4) On-the-job training conducted by the employing library itself. Learning while serving does promote familiarity with the assets of each particular library facility.

The increased utilization of these four modes, in conjunction with their

related settings discussed below, may serve to relieve the urgent shortage of properly trained library professionals.

TYPES OF CONTINUING EDUCATION IN THE NEW CHINA

Supplementary education in China, in a very broad sense, could be considered continuing education, though the objective and the level of learning amongst those so taught differ substantially from those assumed by the West. Basically, continuing education in China provides the opportunity, for both young people and those middle-aged persons from other specialties still unfamiliar with the profession, to obtain new knowledge rather than to update and augment previously acquired knowledge. To recap, several methods of receiving continuing education for library science are available at present. These types are:

1) Advanced study at regular universities for a year,
2) Attendance of spare-time schools (also known as night school, adult education school, or school for advanced studies, etc.) to complete a prescribed program in two to three years,
3) Short training courses, workshops, seminars, etc. that usually run for a month or less,
4) On-the-job training at the employment settings, and finally
5) Correspondence schools or courses.

Those who go to the universities to undertake advanced studies are graduates of other fields of expertise. The formal library education they receive during their year in residence at the postgraduate course is their continuing education. In the fifties, when there were only two to five advanced students each year, an advisor was assigned by the Department of Library Science at Peking University to guide each student in the selection of various fundamental library courses. Unfortunately, now that there are at least thirty per year, there are not enough faculty advisors to individually counsel every student. Still, the number of applicants continually exceed by many times the available openings in the program.

Those who attend the night schools known as "evening universities" or schools for advanced studies are usually members of a cadre of libraries. The only prerequisite for attendance is that such educational opportunities are offered during their spare time in the evening.

The short training courses, workshops, and seminars are designed mostly for selected trainees in special topics. For example, the Department of Library Science at Peking University has recently held a three month workshop on the Processing of Chinese Rare Books. The trainees or, more accurately, the participants were experts from all kinds of libraries. These short sessions are really held to correct the lack of know-how and to resolve any curatorial discrepancies. Thousands of these short courses have been conducted for the benefit of countless trainees since 1949.

Simple topics and practical experience are emphasized in on-the-job training. It is meant to be a stopgap measure, until more qualified staff members are obtained or the training of current clerks and assistants is upgraded.

Correspondence education seems to be the most important and favored method of instruction for library science in China. It is mainly a self-education integrated with tutorials and some lectures, delivered via correspondence between the students and instructors. These correspondence courses are usually held by the related departments or faculties of a university. In China, all of the correspondence students must pass a separate entrance exam, if they did not pass the nationwide examination

sponsored by the Ministry of Education. Correspondence students have been a presence at the Department since 1956, although with several interruptions. In the past, the course of instruction has been modeled somewhat after the approach used by the Open University in Great Britain. The Department of Library Science assigns textbooks and sends out materials which include lecture notes, study guides, and a periodical edited by the Department and titled The Correspondence Education in Library Science. In addition, the Department designates various libraries, most of which are large provincial libraries, as Tutorial Stations in the cities where the correspondence students reside. The Tutorial Stations are responsible for organizing tutorial activities periodically, inviting local experts to do the tutorials, and to check the homework assignments. At the beginning of each term, the local tutors must come to the Department and, under the guidance of university lecturers, make preparations for the upcoming courses. The lecturers, in turn, must visit the individual stations systematically to deliver lectures on additional topics of interest, as well as to resolve any problems of study that the local tutor is unable to solve or is unequipped to handle during that term. After a research paper is completed by the students, a certificate is awarded to them by the corresponding institution. Since the type of education engendered by the correspondence method is more similar to the instruction received from regular university education than the other varieties of supplemental education, it is appreciated by both the students and the libraries concerned. As of 1984, the total number of correspondence graduates in library science from Peking University and Wuhan University exceeded four thousand.

At present, the advantages of correspondence education for us are substantial. First, the correspondence method allows the maximum potential use of existing faculties (the teaching staffs, equipment, and facilities) of library science at universities. For the same personnel and financial cost necessary to train sixty residential students each year, five hundred correspondence students could be enrolled. Not only is the investment per student attractive (the cost ratio of correspondent vs. resident runs 1 : 12.5), but the greater exploitation of the pool of qualified instructors also helps the central government to achieve its goal of greatest output from the least cost in manpower and yuan. Secondly, correspondence students can correlate on-the-job experience with text materials, enabling them to apply theory to library practice much more readily. Finally, the libraries that enroll their junior assistants for further training will immediately benefit when those juniors graduate from the correspondence school a few years later. These newly trained paraprofessionals should progress quickly and be the motivating force for innovation at their respective libraries.

On the other hand, the current correspondence program still suffers from some shortcomings. Although the number of students enrolled has been increased again and again, the demand continues unabated. Also, the textbooks presently used are not specifically designed for the correspondence student, who has at least two years of practical library service. Unfortunately, interruptions, due to such events as the Great Cultural Revolution, have had a more severe impact upon the quality of correspondence education than on other forms of education, so that the competence of correspondents at that time may be slightly suspect.

PROSPECTS OF CONTINUING EDUCATION OF LIBRARY SCIENCE IN CHINA TODAY

Despite technological achievements, China is still a developing country, belonging to the Third World. Although our first library faculty, as mentioned above, was established in 1920 - just one year after the founding

of the London School of Librarianship and Archives, the progress of library education has been extremely slow, lagging even behind those of other developing countries. For example, the state of library science education in China is quite backward in comparison with that in India and the Philippines. While the Peoples Republic of China has been established for nearly thirty-six years, only half of those years yielded any graduates of higher education. Programs dedicated to the Four Modernizations (Industry, Agriculture, Science & Technology, and National Defense) took precedence over spare-time education in both quantity and quality. Unlike the advanced economies of Western Europe, North America, and others, China is neither equipped nor ready to enter the Information Age. We are an evolving industrial state, not the emerging service and information processing society that America is becoming. Therefore, our priorities focus upon increasing the numbers of professional librarians to alleviate the shortage of competently trained staffs needed to maintain libraries across the country, not on which database has the best document retrieval. Continuing education in library science, though not in the traditional sense, will enable China to gradually improve its standards. It is hoped that by the year 2000, the state of library education will only trail current practice by about fifteen years. Perhaps in less than fifty years, China will be ready to join other nations at the cutting edge of technological innovation in library science and become a full-fledged member of the Information Age.